DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 161 092 CS 502 176

AUTHOR Pearce, W. Barnett; Branham, Robert J.
TITLE The Ineffable: An Examination of the Limits of Expressibility and the Means of Communication.
PUB DATE Apr 78
NOTE 29p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association (Chicago, Illinois, April 25-29, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$2.06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adults; Communication (Thought Transfer); *Communication Problems; *Emotional Experience; Higher Education; *Human Relations; *Information Theory; *Intellectual Experience; *Interpersonal Relationship

ABSTRACT

Recurrent claims of ineffable experience and their importance for communication theory are analyzed in this paper. Four positions are identified: (1) the "complete effability/complete communicability" position is historically identified with Western culture but repudiated by modern thought; (2) the "complete ineffability/complete communicability" position has some adherents but is self-defeating; (3) the "complete effability/limited communicability" position provides the conceptual base for most of the work in twentieth-century communication theory; and (4) the "complete ineffability/limited communicability" position has consistent support but requires a new form of theory which differentiates "coordination" and "consubstantiation" as genres. The paper points out that explication of the features of situations which prompt recognition of ineffability and the characteristics of individual and cultural attempts to express the ineffable necessitate a reanalysis of the function of several social institutions, and that this analysis suggests new directions for the development of communication theory. (Author/RL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED161092

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

THE INEFFABLE:

AN EXAMINATION OF THE LIMITS OF EXPRESSIBILITY AND THE MEANS OF COMMUNICATION

by

W. Barnett Pearce
University of Massachusetts

Robert J. Branham
Bates College

presented to

Intercultural Communication Division
International Communication Association
Chicago, Illinois
1978

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

W. Barnett Pearce
Robert J. Branham

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

CS502176

THE INEFFABLE:

AN EXAMINATION OF THE LIMITS OF EXPRESSIBILITY AND THE MEANS OF COMMUNICATION

Wittgenstein (1961, p. 151) concluded the Tractatus by saying "whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent." We disagree. Granted that the inexpressible--by definition--may not be spoken, yet it may--with difficulty--be spoken about, perhaps profitably.

Throughout history, persons have claimed to have experiences which are uniquely significant or valid, but which they cannot convey to others. As Stapledon (1939, p. 418) said, "the ecstatic experience, which is the mystic's supreme reward, is said to give profound insight into the essential nature of reality, along with a stammering inability to describe what has been revealed, save in the most metaphorical and paradoxical terms." Among these "stammerers" is Lao Tzu (1972), who claimed that "the Tao which can be expressed is not the real Tao." Otto (1957) alluded to the "tremendous mystery" of religious experience, then cordially advised all those without this experience to read no further since they would be unable to comprehend the argument. Buddhist koans (such as: "what is the sound of one hand clapping?") are answered in such a way as to demonstrate the futility of logic or language as a means to discover or express reality. The formula "I just can't tell you . . ." (e.g., "how excited I am") has become a commonplace expression of intensity. Depending on one's perspective, such claims for inexpressible knowledge and experience may be seen as arrogant and obscurantist attempts to withhold propositional knowledge from public scrutiny; as evidence of deficiency in communication ability or interest; or as profound comments on the nature of the human condition.

Communication theorists have seldom dealt with experiences claimed to be ineffable: scientific analysis has focused on descriptions of regularly recurring communication processes and critical works have selected unusual examples of common forms of communication. An unintended consequence of these selective processes has been the virtual exclusion from scholarly purview of those experiences which persons claim to be their most significant, such as moments of mystical insight, rapturous "peak experiences," artistic perception or religious ecstasy. There are at least three reasons why such phenomena should receive systematic analysis. First, excluding them beggars communication theory by limiting it to the province of the commonplace. Precisely those events which illumine and infuse our lives with energy are defined outside its competence. Second, a cool-eyed study of the ineffable permits a reasoned assessment of the claims for mystic experiences. To the extent that "seers" introduce their art or ideology into human society, it will be through communication, and a complete theory of communication should account for the processes by which new visions become social cliches. Finally, there is reason to believe that there are different genres of communication each of which requires a different explanatory structure and both of which must be included in a theory of communication. Specifically, communication utilizing socially-constructed meanings may be coordinated by rules, but communication between cultures or about non-socially-sanctioned meanings must rely on symbolic artistry in evoking archetypes. The former genre is exemplified by greeting rituals; the latter by great literature.

The following section contextualizes the inquiry by describing four claims about the existence of the ineffable and the possibility of communication. The contrast between these positions forces the articulation and organization of the basic assumptions from which any theory must proceed. Each

position implies the development of a communication theory considerably different from the others; the assumption that experience is ineffable leads to a novel claim about the form of communication theory.

FOUR CLAIMS ABOUT EXPRESSIBILITY AND COMMUNICATION

Historically and analytically, four positions about the ineffable may be identified based on contrasting assumptions about the expressibility of experience and the possibility of communication.

Complete effability; (potentially) complete communication. The existence of the ineffable is denied by the claim that there exist modes of expression adequate (at least in principle) to represent any human experience. From this perspective, it is assumed that experience is isomorphic with reality. Further, problems in communication are attributable to situational factors (e.g., noise) or deficiencies in individuals' communication skills. Western culture has until recently endorsed this position, and has considered claims of ineffable experience as obscurantism or confessions of personal inadequacy. With characteristic industry, the rhetoricians, social scientists and engineers of Western societies have worked toward complete communication by removing semantic, syntactic and technical barriers. This activity has produced what Matson and Montagu (1967) described as a series of three revolutions: a technological revolution in which the problem of distributing messages over time and distance was reduced; a cybernetic revolution in which the techniques of feedback and control were applied to machinery and society; and an ("unfinished") revolution in which concern for human values was introduced.

The "complete effability" position is consistent with the programs of both the classical Greeks and the logical positivists. The Greeks celebrated speech as the means for employing reason and discovering knowledge. Plato

portrayed Socrates as debating about truth by using speech to critique the use of speech: non-contradictory usages were accepted as correct. Aristotle's three "laws of thought" (identity, exclusion and noncontradiction) provided the basis for logic, which was considered a compendium of rules for the correct use of language which would produce certain (as opposed to merely probable) knowledge. In this century, the logical positivists selected Wittgenstein's picture theory of meaning as the ideal form of scientific language. According to the picture theory, the logic of language is representative of the structure of reality (Morrison, 1968). The positivists argued that (synthetic) statements, the terms of which could be fully defined operationally and the prediction of which could be empirically verified, met this criterion. By organizing these carefully selected statements into valid syllogistic patterns, certain knowledge could be achieved (see, for example, Rapoport, 1969).

The communication theory which derives from this position stresses the fidelity and efficiency of messages, and is most clearly exemplified by Shannon and Weaver's (1949) The Mathematical Theory of Communication.

Complete ineffability; complete incommunicability. This position is the polar opposite of the preceeding one, and represents the solipcist claim that persons are the prisoners of their own experience, unable to know whether it corresponds to any non-subjective reality and unable to communicate it with anyone else (assuming that others exist). If this position were true, we could neither know it nor do anything about it, and no communication theory follows from it. We include it here because it is part of the analysis of positions and because, along with the position of complete effability/complete communicability, it conceptually bounds the next two positions.

Complete effability; limited communicability. This position denies the existence of ineffable experience but affirms real problems in communication

which arise because persons' experiences are not isomorphic. A person's experience is not mysterious to himself and adequate modes of representation exist for him to express that experience, but others may be unable to recognize those expressions if they have no comparable experience. This position assumes that experience is separated from reality by a perceptual process which is not neutral, and that different persons may well experience the "same" event very differently.

This concept underlies much of the work in social science during this century. William James' (1947) concept of a "pluralistic universe" describes reality as a "big, booming, buzzing confusion" out of which persons carve their own perceived environment which may differ significantly from that of their fellows. Studies of perceptual processes (e.g., Gibson, 1966) have stressed the translation processes which occur from event (e.g., light waves), to percept (neural electrical impulses), to concept (experience). Kelley's (1955) "Personal Construct Theory" assumes that encounters with reality are meaningless until interpreted by being filtered through a system of constructs. Since constructs are an individual's own, different persons may construe particular events very differently, or an individual may change his experiences by reconstruing events. Although concepts may be preverbal, they are potentially articulable, given the ministrations of a therapist or researcher. Communication is possible to the extent that individuals have similar constructs or can construe the construct system of the other.

The "linguistic relativity" argument is consistent with this position. Rejecting the notion of language as a passive instrument of thought, Sapir, Whorf and others argued that experience is shaped by and to some extent limited to the categories and logical structures of language (see Slobin, 1971). In addition to creating a discontinuity between reality and experience, this process

assures that the person will have a language adequate for representing his experience although he may have difficulty communicating with persons who do not belong to his speech community.

Finally, the Weltanschauugen school in the philosophy of science forcefully argues a comparable position. Criticizing the positivists' search for a set of observations which would scientifically prove the validity of statements which could be used as the propositions of a theory, Hanson, Kuhn, and Feyerabend claimed that all observation is theory-dependent. Although seeing that (e.g., something is there) is a physical response to the environment, seeing it as (e.g., a sunrise) requires the use of meanings in the "theory" of the observer. Persons with different theories do not see the same thing even when the physical stimulus is similar for both, leading to problems in the testing of theories and in communication (see Suppe, 1974).

The communication problems identified by this approach are typified by the physicist asked to explain his craft to a 3 year old boy ("run along, sonny") or to a benighted humanist colleague ("I'm sorry, but you simply haven't the math") and by the suppression of experience or preclusion of means of expression by taboo, censorship or social disapproval. The communication theory deriving from this position deals with the difficulty in moving between two fields of experience each of which is (in principle) known and expressible by its inhabitant but which may be quite foreign to the other. Exemplars of this approach include Wiseman and Barker's (1974) Speech/Interpersonal Communication, ethnographies of the meanings constructed by various societies (Philipsen, 1975) and analyses of social rules which facilitate coordination (Jackson, 1966).

Complete ineffability; limited communicability. This position claims that experience per se is inexpressible: each of the various modes of repre-

sentation has a particular logic which imposes its own distortion when used to describe experience, and the distortion constitutes a loss. To paraphrase Huxley: the problem that we all face is to have Shakespearean feelings and, unless by chance we happen to be Shakespeare, to talk like accountants or college professors; to touch the pure lyrics of experience and reduce them to verbal equivalents of tripe and hogwash.

The General Semanticist's critique of Aristotelian modes of thought is consistent with this claim. The fundamental tenet of the Korzybskian program is the dissimilarity between reality and language (Korzybski, 1933; Condon, 1975). Several academic traditions which have attempted to describe human awareness have reported an inarticulable substratum of experience. Freud and Jung described the unconscious, which is symbolic rather than rational and is at most only dimly perceived. The Wurzburg school described the aufgabe of thought, which are primitive experiences which cannot be verbally depicted. Arieti's (1976) analysis of creativity postulated the existence of the "endocept" as a description of these phenomena. Endocepts are "primitive" organizations of experience which are expressed only by being translated at some price into words, music, art, etc.

The Buddhist worldview is based on an assumption that truth and experience are ineffable because the nature of reality is unlike the nature of language or propositional knowledge. Knowledge claims are general while reality is absolutely particular, unique and unrelated; propositions are abstract while reality is pure existence, a point-instance in the stream of existence, unextended and unenduring.

The theory which derives from this position differentiates two genres of communication. When enacting socially patterned episodes, such as greeting rituals upon entering an office, conventions (Lewis, 1969) or language-games

(Wittgenstein, 1968) may enable persons to coordinate adequately despite the ineffability of experience: the salt gets passed even though true "saltiness" or the explosion of taste-on-tongue is not experienced or described by any of the messages. Other situations, however, such as an encounter with a significant work of art, prompt recognition of ineffability and, in the absence of social rules, require communication by means of symbolic artistry which evokes (rather than describes) meaning. The former genre consists of coordination; the latter of consubstantiation.

Summary. Of these four positions, the latter two deserve considerable attention. The first seems refuted by the discoveries of a score of disciplines and the second is futile regardless of its veracity. The third, the "complete effability/limited communicability" position, is well represented in the literature; the fourth, the "complete ineffability/limited communicability" position, is not. Because it has received relatively little attention and because it has the potential of accounting for those significant events which people report as inexpressible, this paper will develop the fourth position.

An analysis of this position appropriately focuses on two phenomena: the expressibility of human experience and the means by which persons achieve communication.

EXPERIENCE AND EXPRESSION

The assumption that experience is ineffable seems to require that a discussion of it be idiosyncratic, exotic and mystical. However, the fact that the content of experience is ineffable does not preclude a rigorous and general inquiry into the phenomenon of ineffability. The implications of a provisional acceptance of the claim that experience is inexpressable may be explored through the answers to three questions: 1) What prompts recognition of ineffability? 2) When and in what manner is the communication of ineffable

experience attempted? and 3) What is the cultural importance of the recognition of and attempts to communicate the ineffable?

The recognition of the ineffable. Based on relevant testimony, we can conclude that the recognition of the ineffable is not limited to particular types of (e.g., spiritual) phenomena and does not necessarily result in traumatic revolutions of one's perceptual sets. Static and relatively familiar phenomena such as Huxley's (mescaline-induced) vision of a vase of flowers, Keats' Grecian urn, and Warhol's soupcan may become evocative, significant and ineffable through a process of what the Russian Formalists would call "radical defamiliarization" or the phenomenologists "making uncanny" (Duff, 1970; Huxley, 1954). By the same token, even truly exceptional events can be trivialized, as some have claimed about the ritualized degeneration of Taoism and as the 6th century B. C. prophets and later Jesus claimed about Judaic religious rituals. Recognition of ineffability thus is an aspect of the "I" of the beholder: it is more an epistemic attribute of experience than an ontologic claim for the existence of a special category of reality. Further, recognition of the ineffable may be a temporally isolated experience such as a drug-induced vision or a life-long, cognitively integrated enlightenment or conversion. Such experiences may be the result of diligent searching, as in classical Zen training, or accidentally encountered, as in the case of the conversion to Christianity of the agnostic C. S. Lewis (1955), who described himself as "surprised by joy."

Regardless of the type of phenomenon or persistence of the experience, persons seem to recognize the ineffable when they confront their experience with language (or some other representation system) in a social context. The history of rhetorical theory is filled with more or less organized opposition to language as a sufficient means of describing experience. The Cynics of Diogenes, early

scientific societies (Wenzel, 1974) General Semanticists, contemporary protest movements, and Zen monks all concur in a desire to move "beyond the veil of words" whether by diatribe, number, subscripts and etc. conventions, mass demonstrations or the koan (Hoffman, 1975; Miura & Sasaki, 1966). In Swift's satire of the Academy, the problem of the relation between language and reality is solved by the simple expedient of carrying sacks of useful referent objects: one converses with one's colleagues by pointing rather than speaking. (It is interesting to note that a truly learned professor, according to Swift, is easily discernable by his pronounced stoop.)

According to the theory proposed in this paper, individuals coordinate their own and others' behavior relevant to particular experiences by learning language games which, although the statements made may have absolutely no descriptive relation to the experience, serve to create the conditions necessary for the experience to occur. For example, the utterance "piease pass the salt" (or better, the cryptic "after you're finished . . .") may resist philosophic analysis as propositions but may make possible an inexpressible tangy explosion of taste on tongue. With repetition, these language games tend to obscure the ineffability of experience, so much so that a rather conventional member of an homogeneous culture may never have occasion to communicate about an experience for which there is no available language game. Such a person may well have, as Chesterton (1927) warned, forgotten that these means of coordination were man-made, artificial implements, and not the thing itself. Those who do remember become the critics decrying the meaninglessness and decadence of their cultural institutions.

Two types of social contexts impel recognition of the ineffable: those in which the language games are unavailable or unsuccessful, as when a person has a culturally unique experience or is communicating cross-culturally; and those in which the society has deliberately circumvented normal means of coordination.

Most societies have in some sense provided contexts in which normal means of coordination do not work, thus forcing a confrontation between experience and mode of representation. The process in each resembles the three stages of brainwashing: unfreezing (dislocation); change; and refreezing (Schein, Schnieier & Barker, 1961). The "dislocation" is produced by a conscious punctuation of quotidian reality in law, logic, language or convention: monastic communities seek physical isolation and take vows of sanctioned deviancy; artists assume an elitist creativity in concept or execution; drug experience is contextualized as ritualized discovery (as in Yaqyui peyote rites) or conscious violation of social mores (as in a furtive high school drinking spree), and rites of passage are marked by awesome ceremony and physical danger. "Change" is produced by ascribing particular significances or expectations to events. Zen initiates follow a strictly imposed discipline leading toward the socially identified goal of enlightenment. Drug users expect alterations in their experience of reality and are often directed toward its recognition and appreciation by other people. "Refreezing" consists of social labeling or typing processes, sometimes aided by the individual who marks the reality of his experience by adopting new manners of speech, dress, action or association, for example, as a "born again Christian" reinforces and is reinforced by the spiritual community in the belief that he has experienced a uniquely significant event.

From this perspective, formal and informal social institutions which circumvent normal processes of coordination are interpretable as manifestations of a (perhaps latent) cultural recognition of the ineffability of experience and the necessity to acknowledge it at least periodically. This interpretation suggests a reassessment of the role of monastic orders, of art which strains to annihilate itself by denying its own expression, and of scholarly reminders

of the gap between the mode of representation and that which is represented (Sontag, 1969): they are seen as cultural anchors which function to slow and inhibit too easy dependence on a limited repertoire of language games. Representing the systemic wisdom of a viable culture, they comprise sanctioned alarms which disrupt the social order by reminding it that it is artificial and limited. This line of reasoning suggests that formal social contexts which prompt recognition of the ineffable would occur most frequently in homogeneous, isolated cultures, since frequent cross-cultural contact would serve much the same function.

While certainly not all private experience is prompted by social institutions, the recognition of ineffability requires social reference. For those instances of visionary experience which occur independent of social direction or whose breadth or intensity transcend the disectional institution, social reality--whether linguistic or conventional--still serves as a basis for comparison. For example, the question and answer pattern of the Zen koan offers an intriguing but ultimately futile exercise in logic and language. There is no verbally significant or "logical" answer; what is achieved is a sense of necessary transcendence of the "frame" in which the question is asked. The koan does not attempt to express the ineffable, but to cue and confirm its existence. In this sense the koan has been compared to a brick used to knock upon the gate of enlightenment; once the gate is opened, the brick is discarded because it bears no intrinsic meaning. "What is the nature of enlightenment?", the novice inquires in one classic interchange. "A bowl full of snow," the master responds.

Attempts to express the ineffable. Paradoxically, the most intense experiences are those which persons would most like to but are least likely to be able to communicate. Intense emotions, vivid sensation, aesthetic apprecia-

tion, religious ecstasy all function as "irreducible metaphors" beyond the normal limits of intersubjectivity (Alston, 1964, pp. 103-106).

Like the man who discovered the existence of the sun in Plato's myth of the cave, those who would carry the message that appearential reality consists of shadows are thwarted by the limitations of the "language of the tribe," and must purify it (Huxley, 1963). These attempts sometimes produce bizarre consequents: ecstatic Christians engage in glossalalia [illegible] "shakes"; and enlightened monks may be inflicted with "[illegible] sickness," a malady whose primary symptom, an incessant composition and recitation of poetry, can be cured only by extended isolation. More systematic attempts to express the ineffable are art and science. Science refines the language of the tribe by increasing the precision of its use and by verifying truth-claims. Artists refine the language of the tribe, according to Huxley, for "the express purpose of creating a language capable of conveying, not the single meaning of some particular science, but the multiple significance of human experience, on its most private as well as its more public levels." (Huxley, 1963, p. 118).

The artistic enterprise is based on the assumption that there are strong commonalities in human experience--we will later designate these as archetypes--which can be evoked if not necessarily described. The achievement of consubstantiality in communication involves the elicitation of appropriate meanings, not their bald or precise description (Burke, 1969). The characteristics of literature which is "great"--e.g., is perceived as meaningful by persons in diverse cultures and epochs--seem to focus on a particular type of ambiguity.

Three paradoxical attributes appear to be universal in manifestations of artistic greatness: the forcing of attention beyond the representational icon itself--poesis rather than mimesis; the evocation of multiple ranges of meaning--the appeal to universals with an infinite scope of individual applications;

and the vivacity of evoked experience--the stark chill of profound recognition as opposed to the "warm fuzzy feeling" of simple identification (Branham, 1977). Mona Lisa's smile is ambiguous yet universally evocative, representing an artistically valid use of symbolism. The famed "flower sermon" of Gautama operated in a similar fashion. The Buddha is said to have slowly twirled a flower in his fingers, never speaking, but watching his gathered disciples for a sign of understanding. Upon observing a monk named Kashyapa who had apparently been enlightened by the wordless and ambiguous "sermon," the Buddha smiled and presented him with his begging bowl and robe as a sign of the transmission. Kashyapa in turn is said to have conveyed that smile to several succeeding generations of monks.

The literary genre most consistently devoted to the explicit interplay of private experience and public expression is that of fantastic fiction. Proceeding from the accepted premise of impossibility, fantasy attempts to convey an internal consistency and reality of the supernatural, the imaginary world, or cosmic vision. As Dante ascends through Paradise, he pronounces that "what I must now delineate no voice / Ever communicated nor ink wrote; nor was it ever grasped by the imagination" (III, 19). The task facing the author of fantasy is an awesome one. While all fiction in some sense seeks to portray and elaborate an imaginary world peopled with imaginary beings, fantasy goes one step farther: it depicts characters and settings beyond our repertoire of perceptual bases which operate upon physical and social orders in direct violation of our knowledge of reality. The objective fantasy is an intensely private vision driven toward communicability. The danger of incomprehensibility is ever-present, as Lord Dunsany (1969) cautions in The King of Elfland's Daughter: "If through fault of mine my reader should fail to picture the peaks of Elfland, my fancy should never have strayed from the fields we know."

The fantasists have provided an impressive array of techniques designed to blend the ineffable with communicable fiction. Olaf Stapledon (1937), who in Star Maker undertakes the modest objectives of determining the place of community in the universe and portraying the true nature of the supreme being, employs an intellectual quasi-history of intelligence in this cosmos and others. Stapledon's evolutionary narrator rises with the breadth of historical scope to a level finally capable of at least glimpsing, if not fully understanding, the nature of the Star Maker. David Lindsay (1968), in A Voyage to Arcturus, portrays a Nietzchean world illuminated by two suns which bear unearthly spectra. The difficulty of describing a color, particularly a color never seen such as Lindsay's "ulfire" or "jale," is enormous; as Lindsay notes, "As regards the Alppaine colors, blue stands in the middle and is therefore not existence, but relation, Ulfire is existence, so it must be a different sort of existence." Through musical and emotional referents, Lindsay conveys at least a functional understanding of unseen physical phenomena. H. P. Lovecraft, acknowledged master of supernatural horror, takes an entirely different route of expressing a profoundly private vision. Instead of attempting to expand the narrative perspective to accommodate the vision or establishing philosophical frames of reference, Lovecraft (1971) appeals to the "gibbering nameless horrors of chaos" lurking in some form in the reader's mind. The intense, if private, fears of the individual reader are seen as infinitely more powerful than the fear instilled through direct physical description in textual display.

In whatever communicative form chosen, fantastic fiction at its best provides a compelling transmission, if not translation, of ineffability. The vision produced remains vivid, if undefinable. As philologist Elwin Ransom in C. S. Lewis' (1968) Perelandra returns to earth from a visionary experience on Venus and is asked to describe his adventures, he responds: "it is words

that are vague. The reason why the thing can't be expressed is that it's too definite for language."

In any of its expressive formats, the social context of ineffability provides a relational bridge between the realms of private and public experience. Effective translation need not involve literal expression; indeed, private vision can be shared at the level of social direction and value (as in sanctioned religious enlightenments), commonality of inducement (as in drug subcultures), or appreciation of the ambiguous expression itself (as in art and literature). Thus, while glossalalia communicates no direct connotative meaning in its use of language foreign to the speaker (and almost always to the listener), it serves as a "supernatural sign that God was in the midst of these believers" and evokes recognition and understanding from worshippers who have had similar visions (Christenson, 1968). The diverse sensory experiences of drug use may be unique for every participant, yet a relational bond exists among users based upon the drug inducement and its attendant rituals. Even in the description of experience unrelated to drug use, the accepted terminological referents of the drug experience bear meaning for members of the subculture. In fantasy fiction, the limits of imagination are ever-stretched; yet where description fails, communication still often succeeds.

The dual continua of experience and expressive competence thus intersect. While the most gifted poet may never be able to deal directly with the most private of human experience, our contextually shared private experiences may often be conveyed to some degree by common cultural tools or perhaps without words at all.

The significance of attempts to express the ineffable. Those who tamper with the language of the tribe in an attempt to express the ineffable have met a variety of social responses. Visionaries have been burned as witches, revered as prophets, feted as artists, canonized as saints, and incarcerated as

lunatics. Depending in part of the expressor's artistry and the culture's receptivity, responses have ranged from outrage to gratitude, from bewilderment to comprehension, from rejection to incorporation.

For the most part, society seems to operate on the "automatic pilot" of coordinated activities produced by re-enacting sanctioned episodes, scripts and games. If the ineffable is successfully evoked, the expressor is likely to be honored (perhaps posthumously) and society is the richer for its contact with the mystery of existence. If the society rejects the attempted expression, the expressor may be alienated or driven insane by a persistent reminder of his lack of symbolic and experiential commonality, and the society becomes more rigid and artificial. Reactions to Stapledon's (1937) Star Maker illustrate these societal effects. Some readers found the description of the Star Maker exhilerating because it expanded the scope of their consciousness; others found it depressing because the role of the human species was depicted as short and futile.

Reflecting Rogers and Shoemaker's (1971) analysis of the adoption of innovations, however, most of those who attempt to express the ineffable are confronted with a mixed response, including a small number of enthusiastic endorsees and more or less formal rejection by the majority. If opposing forces are repressive, as in the case of Christians in the U.S.S.R. or the drug culture in the U.S., the persecution creates strong community ties within the group which may facilitate the development of elaborate means of symbolizing the commonly-acknowledged experience. If the opposing forces are tolerant, bi-experiential actors capable of communicating within multiple private and social realms may be produced. Swift's (1933) Laputans, for example, spent most of their time in private contemplation of the abstract but could be called upon to attend the interactive necessities of social life

and trivial conversation when reminded by a servant who would strike the appropriate speaker's mouth and listener's ear with a pebble-filled bladder. Or perhaps, as a consequence of the ascent of man in progressive civilization, we have learned largely to avoid the realm of private experience or repress its contemplation and expression as we concentrate upon the daily business of society.

No matter how private and incommunicable the experience and its interpretation, human action operates within a social context. This context, in varying degrees, directs attention toward and prompts recognition of the experience, generates the means or limits for its attempted expression, and most certainly issues an interactive response to attempted expression with concomitant effects upon future experiential and communicative patterns of the individual or social group. Even if the premise of ineffability is accepted for all human experience, particular modes and contexts of ineffable experience have traditionally appeared as culturally constant: religious enlightenment, artistic vision, and drug-induced consciousness being the most obvious. In each instance, the operation of the social context has assumed an important role in the shaping, expression, and social response of private experience.

THE MEANS OF COMMUNICATION

The assumption that all experience is ineffable makes the phenomena of communication problematic. Two questions are suggested: how is it that persons are able to communicate at all?; and, how do persons communicate well? The answers to these questions reinforce the utility of some lines of communication theorizing and suggest some novel integrations and extrapolations.

The position developed in this paper pictures persons in direct experi-

ential contact with their fellows and their environment. This experience is characterized as broad, vivid, common and ineffable. The broadness and vividness of primary experience has frequently been attested to by psychoanalysts, whose portrayals of subconscious dreams, images and urges indicate that these are unrestricted and undiluted, and by mystics and artists, whose behavior and descriptions frequently scandalize the refined elements of society (see Bettelheim, 1976). A key assumption is that experience is common. Because all members of the human species have comparable perceptual equipment and live in an environment which operates according to the same physical laws, they develop "archetypes" which function as the irreducible templates for the perception or generation of patterns. Koch's (1955) analysis of signs indicated that a vertical stroke means something different than a horizontal one in all cultures (presumably because all humans have lived in an environment in which gravity is a factor). Similarly, Jung (1964) noted that round symbols in all cultures mean something different than long, narrow or pointed ones (presumably because of the permeability of skin to things with points). Only the most heavily enculturated Occidental would describe Yang and Ying as a dichotomy--or even as a bipolar continuum. Finally, it is assumed that any mode of representation of this experience is a map rather than the territory: the experience itself is ineffable.

A society is, by definition, a group which has achieved a means of replacing anarchic chaos with some form of order. This order consists in part of the constitutive definitions of the acts, agents, scenes, purposes and agencies which comprise reality (Searle, 1969; Burke, 1969b) and in part of the norms and rules which govern and guide behavior (Jackson, 1966). When an individual is socially constructed, he superimposes the social constructed reality on his own direct experience, and learns to communicate within this confined,

pale surrogate for experience.

We can now answer the first question. Communication occurs in two forms. The first consists of coordination, and reinforces the social order. Based on a knowledge of social reality and the rules which govern behavior, persons may co-enact episodes such as church, classroom, or barroom brawl. There is no way for individuals to be certain that their experiences of the event are comparable to others, but this is irrelevant as long as each produces actions which the others can interpret as those which constitute the event in which they think they are participating. Usually, a gadfly who questions the "real" meaning of an event is perceived as a threat to the social order and is ostracised as "philosopher," "egg-head" or more parsimoniously, "wet blanket." The practical value of coordination is that it facilitates the maintenance of order--most persons can pick the way through the bulk of their day's requirements on "automatic pilot," without having to spend considerable amounts of energy struggling to express or understand. The price of coordination is that it limits communication to the range of experiences sanctioned and symbolized by the society, and these may well become sterile and repetitious.

The second form of communication is consubstantiation, in which a person evokes in others but does not describe experiences. By the artisitc use of symbols, a skilled rhetor may allude to needs or attitude clusters associated with an archetypal experience and refresh awareness of it without describing it (Burke, 1969a, pp. 20ff). Consubstantiation is always a threat to the (existing) social order because it reminds persons of the narrowness and tepidness of social reality. However, as we argued above, such reminders may be necessary for the long-run viability of a system.

The second question, that of how persons manage to communicate well, presupposes different criteria for each kind of communication. Coordination is

successful when two or more persons are able to generate a series of actions which mesh. An exemplary performance is one in which the communicators have conformed carefully to the center of the permissable latitudes of meanings and messages, and thus best approximated a stereotypic interaction, for example, a "hi, how are you" exchange. Consubstantiation is successful when a person is able to transcend or penetrate cultural meanings and evoke the vivid primal experience. An exemplary performance is one in which the participants may be stammeringly unable to account for what happened, but they know beyond doubt that it was significant.

The two forms of communication are not mutually exclusive, however, and an integration of them is perhaps the maximally effective communicative experience. Primitive societies institutionalized combinations of coordination and consubstantiation in rituals and myths: to the extent that these served as substitutes for technology, science and entertainment and were not pale repetitions of form, they provided scripts, assuring coordination, which fused the common activities of the tribe (relocating; the agrarian cycle; life-stages) with primal fears (spirits; monsters) and cultural myths (creation; continuation; heroic deeds) (Becker, 1975; Eliade, 1963). Modern societies are more individualistic. While the social order retains some formal intercourse between coordination and consubstantiation (as in literary genres, temples, sports, and drug use) by the de-mythologizing and de-ritualizing social reality, many episodes have become bareboned scripts permitting considerable flexibility in enactment. Those individuals who enact these episodes with flawless coordination are considered safe, conventional and a bit dull. Those who mix consubstantiation-play into their enactment--who achieve both coordination and the energy and vivacity of evoked primal experience--are prized and praised as conversationalists, orators, and artists.

Obviously, consubstantiation-play risks disrupting coordination: "we must not assume that the sole purpose of communication is to insure full understanding by every hearer. Such an ideal would entail the banishment of wit and vivacity from human discourse and the anaesthetization of keener intellects by laborious explanation. In these matters, the speaker must at times take calculated risks: sometimes his remarks will fall on stony ground and he will have lost the gamble" (Parry, 1967, p. 95).

CONCLUSION

This inquiry has shown that the assumption that all experience is ineffable does not preclude the possibility of accounting for communication. On the contrary, it permits the inclusion of a category of events which otherwise must be ignored. The personal and social significance of communication situations which provoke recognition of ineffability were assessed, and the implications of ineffable experience for communication theory were discussed. Two forms of communication, coordination and consubstantiation, were contrasted, each of which requires a theory with different primitive terms of a different logic of explanation.

The theories presented here proffer a powerful and sensitive way to account for human communication. However, they are far from fully worked out. In fact, the confrontation between the formal apparatus of theory and the diversity and vivacity of ineffable experience may create a situation comparable to that in modern physics where theoretical elegance is unobtainable. Stapledon (1939, p. 418) warned that "all intellectual descriptions and interpretations of the mystical experience must be regarded with great suspicion. It is after all very unlikely that human thought and language, which are adapted to much more simple, more commonplace experience, should be able to

cope with experience of a very different order." To paraphrase a common assessment, more thinking needs to be done, and that, resourcefully and innovatively. The importance of ineffability for the further development of communication theory lies in its ability to provoke, to challenge, to lay bare metatheoretical assumptions and to coalesce vast ranges of significant human action heretofore ignored in disciplinary construction.

REFERENCES

ALSTON, W. P. Philosophy of language. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964.

ARIETI, S. Creativity: the magic synthesis. New York: Basic Books, 1976.

BECKER, R. Escape from evil. New York: Free Press, 1975.

BETTELHEIM, B. The uses of enchantment. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1976.

BRANHAM, R. J. Translating the ineffable: Olaf Stapledon's cosmic 'stammering.' Unpublished paper, Bates College, 1977.

BURKE, K. A rhetoric of motives. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969a. Originally published in 1950.

BURKE, K. A grammar of motives. Berkeley: University of California, 1969b. Originally published in 1945.

CHESTERTON, G. K. Orthodoxy. New York: Dodd, Mead, 1927.

CHRISTENSON, L. Speaking in tongues. Minneapolis: Dimension, 1968.

CONDON, J., JR. Semantics and communication. New York: Macmillan, 1975. Second edition.

DUFF, R. A. Poetic vision and the psychodelic experience. New York: Delta, 1970.

DUNSANY, L. The king of Elfland's daughter. New York: Ballantine, 1969. Originally published in 1923.

ELIADE, M. Myth and reality. New York: Harper, 1963.

GIBSON, J. J. The senses considered as perceptual systems. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966.

HOFFMAN, Y. The sound of one hand. New York: Basic Books, 1975.

HUXLEY, A. The doors of perception. New York: Harper and Row, 1954.

HUXLEY, A. Literature and science. New York: Harper and Row, 1963.

JACKSON, J. A conceptual and measurement model for norms and roles. Pacific Sociological Review, 1966, 9, 35-47.

JAMES, W. Essays in radical empiricism and a pluralistic universe. New York: Longmans, Green, 1947.

JUNG, C. Man and his symbols. Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday, 1964.

KELLY, G. The psychology of personal constructs. New York: Norton, 1955. Volumes I and II.

KOCH, R. The book of signs. New York: Dover, 1955. Originally published in 1930.

KORZYBSKI, A. Science and sanity. Lancaster, Penn.: Science Press, 1933.

LEWIS, C. S. Perelandra. New York: Macmillan, 1968. Originally published in 1944.

LEWIS, C. S. Surprised by joy. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1955.

LEWIS, D. K. Convention: a philosophical study. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969.

LINDSEY, D. A voyage to Arcturus. New York: Ballantine, 1968. Originally published in 1927.

LOVECRAFT, H. P. At the mountains of madness. New York: Ballantine, 1971. Originally published in 1934.

MATSON, F. & MONTAGU, A. The human dialogue. New York: Free Press, 1967.

MIURA, I. & SASAKI, R. F. Zen dust: the history of the koan and koan study in rinzai zen. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1966.

MORRISON, J. C. Meaning and truth in Wittgenstein's 'Tractatus.' The Hague: Mouton, 1968.

OTTO, R. The idea of the holy. London: Oxford University Press, 1957. Originally published in 1936.

PARRY, J. The psychology of communication. London: University of London Press, 1967.

PHILIPSEN, G. "Speaking 'like a man' in Teamsterville: culture patterns of role enactment in an urban neighborhood." Quarterly Journal of Speech, 1975, 61, 13-22.

RAPOPORT, A. Operational philosophy: integrating knowledge and action. San Francisco: International Society for General Semantics, 1969. Originally published in 1953.

ROGERS, E. & SHOEMAKER, F. Communication of innovations: a cross-cultural approach. New York: Free Press, 1971.

SCHEIN, E., SCHNEIER, I. & BARKER, C. Coercive persuasion: a socio-psychological analysis of the 'brainwashing' of American civilian prisoners by the Chinese communists. New York: Norton, 1961.

SEARLE, J. Speech acts: an essay in the philosophy of language. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969.

SHANNON, C. & WEAVER, W. The mathematical theory of communication. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1949.

SHERIF, M. The psychology of social norms. New York: Harper, 1966. Originally published in 1936.

SLOBIN, D. Psycholinguistics. Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman, 1971.

SONTAG, S. Styles of radical will. New York: Delta, 1969.

STAPLEDON, W. O. Star maker. London: Methuen, 1937.

STAPLEDON, W. O. Philosophy and living. London: Hazell, Watson and Viney, 1939. Volume II.

SUPPE, F. The search for philosophic understanding of scientific theories. In F. Suppe (Ed.) The Structure of Scientific Theories, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974, 125-220.

SWIFT, J. Gulliver's travels. New York: Oxford Press, 1933. Book II, chapter 2.

TZU, L. Tao te ching. New York: Vintage, 1972. Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English, trans.

WENZEL, J. W. Rhetoric and anti-rhetoric in early American scientific societies. Quarterly Journal of Speech, 1974, 60, 328-336.

WISEMAN, G. & BARKER, L. Speech/interpersonal communication. New York: Chandler, 1974. Second edition.

WITTGENSTEIN, L. Tractatus logico-philosophicus. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961. (Originally published in 1921).

WITTGENSTEIN, L. Philosophical investigations. New York: Macmillan, 1968. Originally published in 1953.